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ABSTRACT

This article tabulates doctoral research activity in social studies education as found in "Dissertation Abstracts" published between 1982 and 1991. In this computer-based search, 499 dissertations were identified using "Dissertation Abstracts OnDisc" which is available on CD-ROM. A variety of descriptors were used, one of the least helpful being "social studies." From the dissertation abstracts of these 499, productivity levels were generated by yearly output, page length, gender, grade/level, terminal degree, graduate institution, research type, and topic. In addition, using data reported on five earlier dissertation overviews, research summaries were compiled for the purpose of comparison with contemporary data. Due to a transition in 1991 through 1993 in how research information was identified and categorized, the study was limited to the years 1982-1991. The primary problems of incomplete data due to the information escaping notice or the focus of the research not being clearly related to social studies based on the title alone is recognized. This study does not set out to cut any new intellectual ground, nor interpret, classify or evaluate dissertation work in social studies. The report offers general descriptive information on dissertation research. These data may be useful to graduate students in social studies, theses supervisors, and those interested in general trends in social studies dissertation research. (EH)

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ED 380 376

# DISSERTATION RESEARCH IN SOCIAL STUDIES 1982-1991

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**Abstract**

This article tabulates doctoral research activity in social studies education as found in dissertation abstracts published between 1982 and 1991. In this computer based search, 499 dissertations were identified. From the dissertation abstracts of these 499, productivity levels were generated by yearly output, page length, gender, grade/level, terminal degree, graduate institution, research type, and topic. In addition, using data reported on five earlier dissertation overviews, the authors complied research summaries that were used to compared to contemporary data.

Dissertation Research in Social Studies: 1982-1991

Over the past 20 years as traditional areas of educational research continue, new areas of research, techniques, and topics (representing a variety of paradigms) have gained wider acceptance within the social studies community. One of the most conspicuous places to look for this change is through dissertation research. Building upon earlier dissertation overviews by Chapin (1974), Gross and De La Cruz (1971), Hepburn and Dahler (1985), McPhie (1964), and Wrubel and Ratliff (1978), this study investigated social studies education dissertations published between 1982 and 1991. Following closely the Hepburn and Dahler (1985) model for dissertation overview (adapted from earlier studies), this study specifically reports information on gender, grade/area/level, degree, graduate institution, research type, and category.

When we began to examine social studies dissertations published in the past eleven years we encountered increasing difficulty identifying and categorizing research that differed from more traditional quantitative studies as we approached the 1990s. In fact, although we researched dissertations through 1993, it became clear that much of our earlier data did not neatly fit into established categories. As 1991 through 1993 appeared to be transitional years, for the sake of consistency, we decided to set aside our research on 1992 and 1993 dissertations and concentrate on dissertations from 1982 to 1991. While we recognized the need to update and/or reevaluate research categories (even to create new categories), this research simply reports on information readily available from dissertation abstracts. This study was not only dependent, but limited to how a particular author reported his or her own work. As such, this study does not set out to cut any new intellectual ground, nor interpret and classify dissertation work in social studies other than report general information on dissertation research.[1] These data may be useful to graduate students in social studies, theses supervisors, and those interested in general trends in social studies dissertation research.

[1] For a thorough review of recent social studies research, we refer readers to Shaver (1991).

Following Hepburn and Dahler (1985) lead, the purpose of this type of study is "to provide descriptive rather than evaluative information about recent dissertations in the field" (p. 73). Accordingly, no claims as to the quality of the dissertations under review are presented. Our work focused upon dissertation abstracts, not full-completed dissertations. Despite this recognized limitation we believe that these data do suggest a conspectus of social studies research as well as indicate general trends and patterns of graduate research. Moreover, although not attempted here, these data may be useful with benchmarking and other qualitative analyses of social studies education as a whole as well as social studies among graduate degree granting institutions.

Data Resources/Search

Using Dissertation Abstracts OnDisc (formally University Microfilms International) available on CD-ROM, we accessed the majority of data through a variety of descriptors such as education, curriculum and instruction, teacher training, history of education, educational administration, elementary education, secondary education, and social sciences. Remarkably, social studies, although found in the majority of the titles, was not particularly helpful in locating supposed social studies dissertations. Still not all our social studies dissertations could be identified by descriptors alone. Consequently, by reviewing hard copies of abstracts with DA ONDISC, we located a number of other dissertations. We recognize two primary problems with the data, some dissertations may have simply escaped our search and some dissertation titles might have been ignored if we were not able to clearly identify the research focus as social studies. Therefore, our data and findings should not be considered complete.

## Method

In searching out social studies dissertations, we opted to maintain a broad definition of social studies. Our definition included any dissertation that used social studies education, contexts, teachers, comparisons, textbooks, concepts, skills, dispositions, students, and curricula. In addition, we included any dissertation that was related to social studies content and/or methodology. In this broad sense, several thousand dissertations were considered, however, only those that we believed made a direct connection to the field made our final list. Consequently, after titles were identified as social studies, we read each dissertation abstract to determine the problem or thesis, procedures followed, and general results. Working out our differences of interpretation, we were able to classify each dissertation into most the groupings set by Hepburn and Dahler (1985), but for reasons of uncertainty removed the topical classifications used by Hepburn and Dahler (1985) for School Organization, Teacher Education, and Social Studies in Other Countries. As mentioned, a number of research descriptors such as multicultural studies and critical pedagogy were found in greater frequency in the later years of the study, however, these and others were rolled over into existing research patterns. We would predict that in future studies, these research descriptors and many others will warrant separate research categories.

Finally, in processing the data we tabulated the total number of dissertations in social studies education by page length, suspected gender of the author, grade level or area of study, type of graduate degree, graduate institution, and type of research.

## Productivity

In total we located 499 social studies dissertations in the ten year span yielding an average of 49.9 dissertations per year; 42 were published in 1982,[2] 44 in 1983, 49 in 1984, 57 in 1985, 68

[2] Hepburn and Dahler reported 36 dissertations in their study for the first half of 1982, however, upon close examination of UMI published data, we were able to identify only 12 of these 36. Consequently, rather than

in 1986, 53 in 1987, 42 in 1988, 40 in 1989, 52 in 1990, and 52 in 1991. Comparing earlier data, (see Table 4) the 49.9 dissertation per year average represented a significant drop from the 1977-1982 average of 71.6 dissertations per year. When compared with the 1973-1976 survey average of 80.5 and the 1969-1973 survey average of 100, social studies dissertation production is in an apparent state of decline. However, since 1990 the field appears to be stabilized, if not rebounding.

Page Length

The average page length for dissertations published between 1982 and 1991 was 214. Dissertations ranged between 593 pages and 63 pages. Compared to the 1973-1976 survey average of 201 pages and the 1977-1982 survey average of 204 (see Table 5), 214 represented a slight increase. Of the 499 dissertations eight did not supply page information. The total number of pages from the study was 105, 294.

Gender of Author

Of the 499 dissertations, 241 (51 %) authors were identified as males and 232 (49 %) were identified as females authors. Much like the well loved Pat character on Saturday Night Live, we were unable to identify with name only the gender of 26 authors. Overall, since the 1977-1982 survey there was a decline in the percentage of male authors (62% to 51%), with an increase in the percentage of female authors (38% to 49%). In actual numbers, female authorship increased sharply from 148 to 232 since the 1977-1982 survey. Moreover, since 1934 (see Table 6) female authorship has shown signs of steady increase; since 1963 the increase has been dramatic.

continuing with a partial list, we decided to examine dissertations for the entire 1982 year and report these data in whole in this study.

Grade Level/Area

We divided each of the dissertations into one of the following grade level/areas: elementary (K-6), secondary (7-12), college (including university), and general (non-descriptive areas or studies that spanned more than one area). As we attempted to fit all dissertations into these groupings, given some dissertation topics, we would predict that future studies would have to include early childhood and middle-school areas. General dissertations that cut across areas or did not specifically note area or level, led all dissertation with 211; secondary dissertations numbered 170 and elementary dissertations accounted for 108. College level dissertations (teacher education) numbered 10. Between 1963 and 1982 (see Table 7), authors used secondary education contexts for the lion share of dissertations, followed by elementary contexts. However, since 1982 (as found between 1934-1963) general level dissertation contexts have reappeared as the leading level. This renewed interest in K-12 social studies contexts may indicate a more integrated and comprehensive approach to social studies.

Degree

Hepburn and Dahler (1985) reported that the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree was growing in numbers since 1969 (see Table 8), however, when match to the total percentage of the 1977-1982 survey (50%), we found that PhD production held steady with 50% (250) reporting PhDs. Compared to the 1977-82 survey, there was a slight increase in Doctor of Education (EdD) degree from 47% (187) to 48% (240). Nine other degrees were reported, three Doctor of Arts (DA) and six others that we were uncertain as to the exact nature of the degree.

Graduate Institution

As found in Table 1, Indiana University led all graduate institutions with 16 doctoral dissertations followed by Teachers College, Columbia University with 15 dissertations. Rounding out the top ten producers were University of Georgia (13), University of Massachusetts (13), Ohio State University (13), Michigan State University (12), Stanford University (12), Temple University (12), University of Maryland, College Park (11), and Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey (11). Since 1969 (Table 2), the overall top producer was Indiana University with 57 dissertations. Other leaders include Teachers College, Columbia University (47), Ohio State University (47), University of Georgia (41), Stanford University (39), and Temple University (39). While we were not concerned with the quality or quantity of dissertations produced (nor did we seek supporting data), given our historical understandings of the field, it may be argued that dissertation production correlates to a given graduate institution's contribution to the field. For example, Indiana University (and its graduates), led by Professor Shirley Engle has been at the forefront of social studies education through article and book production, leadership/editorship positions, activities within the National Council for the Social Studies, and other contributions. While this singular example is certainly not represent[illegible] the field, there may be a high correlation between the number of dissertations proc[illegible] a particular institution and the reputation of that school's faculty. We might also add to the list of leaders in social studies education the graduate institutions of Teachers College, Ohio State, University of Georgia, and Stanford, and not coincidentally, these institutions are also among the top producers of dissertations since 1969 (see Table 2).

Our data did not account for the wide fluctuations in dissertation production among individual institutions since 1934 and most recently since 1969. However, such institutions as Indiana University, Teachers College, Ohio State, and Georgia have continued as top producers, while such graduate schools as the University of Michigan, that was among the leaders in dissertation production in 1969 (15), dropped to just three dissertations in the 1982-1991 survey.

In sharper contrast, Boston University went from 15 dissertations in the 1977-82 survey (covering 5.5 years) to five dissertations over ten years. In this same period, Florida State went from the leaders list (13 dissertations over 5.5 years) to four dissertations. On the other hand, some institutions, like Rutgers University and the University of Missouri went from a handful of dissertations in 1969 to producing eleven and ten dissertations respectively between 1982-1991. Tables 1 (Top 44 Dissertation Institutions from 1982-1991), 2 (Top 20 Dissertation Institutions 1969-1991), and 3 (Top 20 Dissertation Institutions since 1934) provide comparisons of the top dissertation producers from the five surveys.

Types of Research

Hepburn and Dahler's (1985) classifications continued to be useful for clustering different types of research. These six types of research are as follows:

The *descriptive* classification includes textbook content analyses, survey research, and assessments which give an account of the status social studies education.

The *experimental* classification includes studies utilizing controlled and manipulated variables in experimental or quasi experimental studies.

The *analytical* classification includes theory, model building, and critical analyses of the literature.

The *historical* classification includes recounting and analysis of events, or trends of the past in social studies.

The *developmental* classification refers to research which involved the creation of curriculum materials, curriculum design, and instruments of evaluation. Some studies in this category include the testing of the material developed.

The *ethnographic* classification includes anthropological studies, field studies, and various observations studies of student and/or teacher groups. These are descriptive studies using ethnographic techniques (Hepburn and Dahler, 1985, p. 77).

The greatest number of dissertations were clustered as *descriptive* (178). Followed by *experimental* (143), *ethnographic* (85), *historical* (66), *developmental* (16), and *analytical* (11). Compared to the 1977-1982 survey (see Table 9), *descriptive* and *experimental* dissertations continued as the top categories. However, *descriptive* studies dropped from 45% (177) to 36% (178), while the percent of *experimental* types increased only slightly from 27% (105) to 28% (143). The greatest increases were found in the numbers of *ethnographic* and *historical* dissertations that shifted from 1% (5) to 17% (85) and 6% (22) to 13% (66) respectively. Given trends found in their study, Hepburn and Dahler predicted that *ethnographic*, *analytical*, and *developmental* studies "are likely" to "show up [in greater numbers] in dissertation studies in the future." However, only *ethnographic* studies continued to make gains, while *analytical* and *development* studies percentages dropped from 14% (56) to 2% (11) and 7% (29) to 3% (16) respectively. While we predict *descriptive* studies to continue as the leading form of social studies research, given current trends we would guess that *ethnographic* and *historical* studies would continue to grow in numbers while *experimental* dissertations will decline.

Dissertation Topics by Category

The most problematic area of this study was the identification of dissertations into broad topical categories that were then matched to specific topical areas. For example, Curriculum Materials (as a broad category) matched to Values and Moral Education (as a specific topical area). That is, a dissertation was identified as dealing with Curriculum Materials, specifically curriculum materials that covered values and/or moral education themes. Although we followed Hepburn and Dahler's model for Curriculum Materials and Teaching Methods, matching

dissertations to one of seven specific topical areas, we were unable to sensibly and consistently match Hepburn and Dahler's broad categories of School Organization, Teacher Education, and Social Studies in other countries to their seven specific categories of Citizenship, Economics, Geography, History, Behavioral and other studies, Reading, and Values and Moral Education.

To explain: in general we had no difficulty matching Curriculum Materials and Teaching Methods to specific or even general social studies topics. However, in most cases (using abstracts only), we found dissertations matched to School Organization, Teacher Education, and Social Studies in Other Countries so general in nature that specific classification was not possible. Rather than guessing, we marked all dissertations in these areas as general subjects. We would suspect that future researchers will have to account for the growing number of ethnographic studies that represent a wide number of topics and research interests.

The greatest number of dissertations centered on School Organization, Climate, and Curriculum Organization (182), followed by Curriculum Materials (100), Teaching Materials (97), Social Studies in Other Countries (56), and Teacher Education and Teacher Characteristics (55). Of the five broad areas of the 1977-1982 survey (see Table 10), School Organization, Climate, and Curriculum Organization showed a sharp increase from 24% (96) to 36% (182). The greatest decline was in Curriculum Materials from 27% (105) to 20% (100) and Teaching Methods from 25% (100) to 19% (97). Hepburn and Dahler correctly predicted that Social Studies in Other Countries would increase in future years, 11% (33) to 15% (56).

Within Curriculum Materials and Teaching Methods categories, general subject dissertations led all categories with 38% (38) and 35% (34) respectively. Among the seven specific categories, dissertations in Reading in Social Studies led in both Curriculum Materials and Teaching Methods categories with 21% (21) and 30% (29) respectively.

Overall Comments

Our research into dissertations study revealed a number of interesting and informative conclusions. In historical terms, while this article does not make a case for the significance of dissertation research in social studies education, clearly this area of the field has been quite active since at least 1934 (see Table 3). In addition, while the overall number of dissertations in social studies has declined over the past two decades, several institutions such as Teachers College-Columbia, Indiana, Ohio State, and Stanford have continued to produce a steady number of social studies dissertations. Moreover, such universities as Michigan State, Rutgers, Washington, and Georgia have sharply increased dissertation production in social studies. What these data indicate is that social studies dissertation research continues to attract interest among graduate students.

Regarding dissertation authors, we were not able to clearly distinguish the primary activity or goal of individual authors. That is, abstracts did not provide enough information on whether or not an author was a social studies "professional" working in a K-12 setting or governmental/ school district agency related to social studies. We were also not able to clearly identify those educators whose academic/ professional home stood outside of social studies, but happened to be interested in social studies as a dissertation topic. Nonetheless, judging from those who did supply this type of information, we found many dissertations were written by those whose primary professional activities were largely outside of social studies (i.e. administrators, librarians, educational generalists, reading instructors, educational theorists). One conclusion from this admittedly incomplete data that social studies has been and continues to be of interest among a variety educational settings. In addition, we sense that the number of social studies professionals entering the field as professors of social studies is probably quite small, perhaps amounting to as few as one third of the dissertation authors.

Another interesting point revealed in these data is that social studies dissertation research appeared to follow contemporary trends. Throughout the past fifty years, dissertation research in social studies appears to mirror concerns and issues that were viewed as critical during those

years. For example, issues over multiculturalism, cooperative learning, metacognition, gender equity, among other critical issues (representing contemporary research concerns) are very much reflected in dissertation topics over the past ten years, especially since 1990. Moreover, like comprehensive trends in education in general, it appears that social studies authors, too, have demonstrated a greater interest in conceptualizing social studies in holistic K-12 terms. In contrast, when certain educational issues lost appeal in wider educational circles, dissertation research in social studies subsided in those areas (as was found in the drop in popular 1960s topics related to behavioral objectives/outcomes, Brunerian themes of structured disciplines, and inquiry teaching). Again, although no claim to the worth or significance of dissertation topics is suggested here, it should be highlighted that social studies dissertation research has kept pace with other educational trends and themes.

At another level our dissertation review revealed several suggestions to future authors. First, the importance of a descriptive title and well written abstract cannot be over emphasized. With computers a researcher can access nearly every dissertation written in the United States as well as many from foreign sources, however, computer access is not open (as of yet) to dissertations in their entirety. Therefore, some researchers looking for a particular dissertation may only have a title and at best an abstract to look at. If the title is vague or mistitled a researcher may skip the dissertation. Moreover, a dissertation may be missed despite an adequate title, if its abstract is ambiguous, poorly written, and/or non-descriptive.

Second, as titles and abstracts are typically put together in the final stages of the dissertation work, writers and advisors should take special care to insure that titles and abstracts convey with accuracy the significance of the work. Although abstracts are usually limited to a certain length, titles are not. We would urge writers to include, at the least, the topic, the problem under study, the research nature of the work, level examined, period (if applicable), special subjects, and other descriptive terms. Finally, authors should include social studies by name and other specific subject areas as necessary. Abstracts, too, should be clearly written.

Like a good title, authors would do well if they could succinctly identify the significance of their study, the problem researched, method of research, results, and other relevant information.

In closing, while our purpose was to present generic data on gender, page length, degree, institution, and topics of social studies dissertations (that may or may not contribute much to a greater understanding of social studies research), we did find that social studies dissertation research active and presumably supported not only through the interest of potential doctoral candidates, but also by the continuing attention of thesis supervisors, doctoral committees, and graduate level institutions .

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Table 1: Number of Social Studies Dissertations by Institution: Top 44 in 1982-91.

Indiana University 16
Teachers College, Columbia University 15
University of Georgia 13
University of Massachusetts 13
Ohio State University 13
Michigan State University 12
Stanford University 12
Temple University 12
University of Maryland/College Park 11
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey 11
University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign 10
University of Missouri 10
University of Nebraska 10
University of Wisconsin 10
University of Texas, Austin 9
State University of New York, Buffalo 9
University of Washington 9
University of Iowa 8
University of Pittsburgh 8
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University 8
Arizona State University 7
Northern Illinois University 7
University of Minnesota 7
New York University 7
University of Southern California 7
Auburn University 6
Hofstra University 6
University of Mississippi 6
Ohio University 6
University of Alabama 5
Boston University 5
Harvard University 5
North Texas State University 5
Peabody College, Vanderbilt University 5
University of San Francisco 5
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale 5
Syracuse University 5
West Virginia University 5
University of Colorado 4
Florida State University 4
Mississippi State University 4
University of Northern Colorado 4
Pennsylvania State University 4
University of Southern Mississippi 4

Table 2: Rank by Total Number of Social Studies Dissertations by Institution: Top 20 1969-1991

Indiana University 57
Teachers College, Columbia University 47
Ohio State University 47
University of Georgia 41
Stanford University 39
Temple University 39
Boston University 38
University of Maryland 32
Florida State University 32
University of Michigan 31
University of Texas 31
University of Pittsburgh 29
Pennsylvania State University 28
Syracuse University 28
Auburn University 27
University of Nebraska 27
University of Illinois 26
Michigan State University 26
University of Iowa 22
University of Wisconsin, Madison 21

Table 3: Rank by Total Number of Social Studies Dissertations by Institution: Top 20 1934-1991

| | |
|---|---|
| Teachers College, Columbia University | 102 |
| Stanford University | 99 |
| Indiana University | 80 |
| New York University | 77 |
| Ohio State University | 77 |
| University of Illinois | 63 |
| Boston University | 57 |
| University of Nebraska | 53 |
| Pennsylvania State University | 48 |
| University of Pittsburgh | 48 |
| University of Texas | 48 |
| University of Michigan | 46 |
| Temple University | 44 |
| University of California, Berkeley | 42 |
| University of Georgia | 42 |
| University of Minnesota | 42 |
| University of Missouri | 42 |
| Florida State University | 40 |
| University of Maryland | 37 |
| Syracuse University | 36 |

Table 4: Social Studies Dissertation Production Average Per Year by Study 1969-1991

| Year | Average Per Year |
|---|---|
| 1982-1991 | 49.9 |
| 1977-1982 | 71.6 |
| 1973-1976 | 80.5 |
| 1969-1973 | 100 |

Table 5: Social Studies Dissertation Average Page Length by Study 1973-1976

| Year | Average Page Length |
|---|---|
| 1982-1991 | 214 |
| 1977-1982 | 204 |
| 1973-1976 | 201 |

Table 6: Social Studies Dissertations by Gender 1934-1991

| Year | Total Dissertations | Males | Females |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1982-1991 | 499* | 241 | 232 |
| 1977-1982 | 394 | 246 | 148 |
| 1973-1976 | 322 | 225 | 97 |
| 1969-1973 | 417 | 338 | 79 |
| 1963-1969 | 216 | 173 | 43 |
| 1934-1963 | 568* | 433 | 128 |

* includes dissertations not identified by gender

Table 7: Social Studies Dissertations by Level/Grade 1934-1991*

| Year | Elementary | Secondary | College | General |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1982-1991 | 108 | 170 | 10 | 211 |
| 1977-1982 | 109 | 184 | 6 | 95 |
| 1973-1976 | 242 | 88 | 41 | Not Reported |
| 1969-1973 | 92 | 195 | 96 | 17 |
| 1963-1969 | 89 | 95 | 6 | 20 |
| 1934-1962 | 139 | 213 | - | 216 |

* These numbers represent general trends since Wrubel & Ratliff's study double counted areas and Gross & De la Cruz's and Chapin's studies did not classify each dissertation by area.

Table 8: Social Studies Dissertations by Degree Type 1963-1991*

| Year | PhDs | EdDs |
|---|---|---|
| 1982-1991 | 250 | 240 |
| 1977-1982 | 197 | 187 |
| 1973-1976 | 148 | 164 |
| 1969-1973 | 179 | 234 |
| 1963-1969 | 80 | 134 |
| 1934-1962 | Not Reported | |

* Other degrees not reported

Table 9: Social Studies Dissertations by Type of Research 1977-1991

| Year | Descriptive | Experimental | Analytical | Developmental | Historical | Ethnographic |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1982-1991 | 178 | 143 | 11 | 16 | 66 | 85 |
| 1977-1982 | 177 | 105 | 56 | 29 | 22 | 5 |

Table 10: Social Studies Dissertations by Topical Category 1973-1991

| Category | 1982-91 | 1977-82 | 1973-76 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Curriculum Materials | 100 | 105 | 107 |
| Teaching Materials | 97 | 100 | 135 |
| School Organization & Climate, Curricular Organization | 182 | 96 | Not Reported |
| Teacher Education & Teacher Characteristics | 55 | 60 | 67 |
| Social Studies in Other Countries | 56 | 33 | 13 |
| History of Social Studies | 9 | | |

**Special Note on Tables:** When available we complied these tables using data reported by authors of the individual reports. However, in some cases (especially McPhie) we tabulated figures for use in our study. Readers should be aware that tabulations presented here were most likely conceptualized and processed differently. Consequently, readers should use these data to formulate generalized trends and information.